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FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7300  
INFO ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE  
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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 04 ALGIERS 02184

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR  
TAGS: KPAL PREL KPRP PLO AG  
SUBJECT: ALGERIA AND THE PLO

REF: KPRP 28

¶1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

¶2. SUMMARY: ALGERIA HAS LONG BEEN AN ACTIVE--IF DISTANT--PARTICIPANT IN MIDDLE EAST DIPLOMACY. ENGAGEMENT ARISES FROM ALGERIA'S SELF-PERCEPTION AS ROLE MODEL FOR ALL NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLES AND FROM STRONG EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE ARAB/ISLAMIC CAUSE. POINT OF ENGAGEMENT HAS BEEN THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION, AND ALGERIA HAS CONSISTENTLY TRIED TO IMPART THE "LESSONS LEARNED" FROM ITS OWN STRUGGLE AGAINST COLONIALISM, URGING "UNITY" ON THE PALESTINIANS FIRST AND FOREMOST.

¶3. THE PLO HAS BEEN A SLOW LEARNER. PALESTINIANS HAVE TRIED MIGHTILY TO IMPOSE "UNITY," BUT HAVE LACKED THE RESOURCES AND REACH THAT THE FLN HAD IN ITS WAR AGAINST FRANCE. ALGERIA, NONETHELESS, HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT ALLY FOR THE PLO, AND THE PALESTINIANS HAVE DERIVED BENEFIT FROM THE GOA'S WIDELY VALUED DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS. ALGIERS HAS ALSO SERVED AS A USEFUL VENUE FOR A NUMBER OF PLO ACTIVITIES, MAINLY TRAINING AND LARGE CONGRESSES--SUCH AS THE PNC SLATED FOR APRIL 20.

¶4. ALGERIA, FOR ITS PART, HAS COMPLETED A LONG JOURNEY FROM THE REJECTIONIST/STEADFASTNESS FRONT APPROACH TO THE MIDDLE EAST DISPUTE, BUT IT STILL VIEWS THE CAMP DAVID APPROACH AS A SELLOUT OF ESSENTIAL PALESTINIAN INTERESTS. BUT, WHILE CHAMPIONING THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE, ALGERIA HAS LEFT UNCLEAR WHAT IT THINKS THE VIABLE SOLUTION TO THE ARAB-ISRAEL DISPUTE COULD BE. THE GOA REJECTS "TERROR" AS A TACTIC, BUT STILL REGARDS ACTS OF VIOLENCE "IN THE TERRITORY TO BE LIBERATED" AS ACCEPTABLE. END SUMMARY.

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TO PNC OR NOT TO PNC  
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¶5. ALGERIA IS PLANNING TO HOST THE PALESTINE NATIONAL CONGRESS ON APRIL 20 AFTER A PREPARATORY MEETING STARTING APRIL 13. THESE MEETINGS ARE THE RESULT OF MORE THAN TWO YEARS OF INTRICATE, CONFUSING, AND OFTEN FRUSTRATING DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS AND PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS WITH NUMEROUS PALESTINIAN FACTIONS AND OTHER ARAB STATES. WHILE ALGERIA WILL BE PLEASED IF THERE IS A SUCCESSFUL PNC, THE LONG-TERM GOAL REMAINS PUTTING TOGETHER A MORE LASTING UNITY THAT WILL ALLOW THE PLO TO PARTICIPATE COHESIVELY IN AN ARAB SUMMIT, AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, AND EVENTUAL NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL. ALGERIA'S DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS HAVE SOUGHT TO COMPOSE INTERNAL PALESTINIAN DIFFERENCES, INDUCE SYRIA TO PUT ASIDE ITS PAROCHIAL OBJECTIVES AND DISLIKE FOR YASSIR ARAFAT, AND SOLICIT SOVIET SUPPORT FOR UNITY UNDER ARAFAT. AT THE SAME TIME, ALGERIA HAS ALSO BEEN CAREFUL TO HOLD OUT A GLIMMER OF HOPE THAT

EGYPT CAN REJOIN THE ARAB COMMUNITY WITHOUT ABANDONMENT OF ITS ESSENTIAL INTERESTS. WITH THESE FACTORS TO DEAL WITH, IT WILL BE NO SMALL FEAT IF THE PNC ACTUALLY CONVENES APRIL 20.

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HISTORY LESSONS  
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16. THE ALGERIANS CONSIDER THEIR WARTIME EXPERIENCE A MODEL FOR LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND FOR THE PLO IN PARTICULAR. FOR THE ALGERIANS, MAINTAINING REVOLUTIONARY UNITY UNDER THE FLN UMBRELLA PREVENTED BOTH THE FRENCH AND OTHER ARAB STATES FROM EXPLOITING PUBLIC CLEAVAGES TO THEIR ADVANTAGE. ONCE THE ALGERIANS MADE IT CLEAR THAT FRANCE COULD HOLD ON NO LONGER IN NORTH AFRICA, THE FLN ATTAINED VIRTUALLY ALL OF ITS OBJECTIVES. IN URGING THESE LESSONS ON THE PALESTINIANS, HOWEVER, THE ALGERIANS OVERLOOK ONE KEY FACTOR: THEIR UNITY WAS THE RESULT OF RUTHLESS LIQUIDATION OF ANY ELEMENT THOUGHT RECALCITRANT OR INCONVENIENT, FROM HARKIS WHO FOUGHT WITH FRANCE TO COMMUNISTS WHO JOINED THE STRUGGLE FOR ANTI-NATIONALIST GOALS. TRY AS THEY MIGHT, THE PALESTINIANS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE UNITY ON THIS BASIS.

17. IN DEALING WITH THE PLO, THE ALGERIANS HAVE TRIED--WITH VARYING SUCCESS--TO CONVEY A FOUR-PART MESSAGE TO THEIR PALESTINIAN FRIENDS:

- A) ALGERIA IS UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO ADVISE MOVEMENTS ENGAGED IN "NATIONAL LIBERATION" STRUGGLES.
- B) A KEY ELEMENT OF SUCCESS IS CONCEALING INTERNAL DISPUTES BEHIND A FAÇADE OF UNITY.
- C) NO OUTSIDE POWER CAN BE ALLOWED TO DICTATE GOALS, LEADERSHIP, AND STRATEGY. THE PALESTINIANS, IN CONTRAST TO THE FLN, HAVE SPLINTERED INTO FACTIONS IDENTIFIED CLOSELY WITH ARAB STATES THAT HAVE SACRIFICED PALESTINIAN INTERESTS FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR OWN PAROCHIAL OBJECTIVES.
- D) ALGERIA HAS MAINTAINED CONTACT WITH ALL PALESTINIAN GROUPS FROM THE MAIN-LINE FATAH TO THE EXTREME ABU NIDAL ORGANIZATION AND HAS INSISTED THAT UNIFICATION OF ALL FACTIONS, WHATEVER THEIR IDEOLOGY, IS THE ONLY WAY TO ADVANCE THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE.

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MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT  
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18. IN ADDITION TO LESSONS ON HOW TO ORGANIZE A REVOLUTIONARY WAR, ALGERIA HAS FURNISHED THE PLO MORE TANGIBLE MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT. AS OF LATE MARCH 1987, ABOUT 600 PALESTINIAN COMBATANTS WERE LOCATED WITH THE ALGERIAN MILITARY AT EL-BAYADH, A REMOTE SITE ABOUT 600 KILOMETERS SOUTHWEST OF THE CAPITAL. THESE COMBATANTS, WHO ARE REPORTEDLY UNHAPPY WITH THEIR LOT IN THE REMOTE DESERT LOCATION, HAD MOVED TO EL-BAYADH IN LATE 1986 FROM A CAMP AT TEBESSA, NEAR THE TUNISIA FRONTIER.

19. ALGERIA ALSO HOSTS AN OFFICIAL PLO EMBASSY, LED BY AN ARAFAT SUPPORTER, AND SMALL LIAISON OFFICES FOR SOME OF THE PLO FACTIONS. ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL, THE ALGERIANS HAVE, SINCE THE DEATH OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER BENYAHIA IN 1982, DEALT PUBLICLY WITH THE PLO THROUGH THE APPARATUS OF THE RULING PARTY (FLN). THE PLO WORKS WITH THE ALGERIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY ON ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS, WITH THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE ON MILITARY TRAINING, AND WITH THE FLN ON MATTERS OF POLICY. THE MAIN FIGURES WITHIN THE FLN WHO DEAL WITH ALGERIAN-PLO RELATIONS ARE MOHAMMED CHERIF MESSAADIA, HEAD OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT OF THE FLN CENTRAL COMMITTEE, AND HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATE, SADEK

ZOUATEN, CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY COUNCIL OF FRIENDSHIP WITH PEOPLES.

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CATCHING FLIES WITH HONEY  
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¶10. ZOUATEN AND MESSAADIA TAKE CARE OF VISITING PALESTINIAN DELEGATIONS, BUT PRESIDENT BENDJEDID ALSO ENGAGES HIMSELF PERSONALLY, RECEIVING MOST PALESTINIAN DELEGATIONS, AND HIS POSITION AS FLN SECRETARY-GENERAL ALLOWS THE ALGERIANS TO PRESERVE THE FORMS OF PARTY-TO-PARTY RELATIONS. THE ALGERIANS CAREFULLY BALANCE THEIR PROTOCOL TREATMENT OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS, ENSURING THAT NONE IS SEEN AS FAVORED. WHEN GEORGE HABBASH AND THE PFLP, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE AT THEIR MOST INTRANSIGENT ON THEIR CONDITIONS FOR ATTENDING ANY REUNIFICATION CONFERENCE, THE ALGERIANS BECOME EVEN WARMER AND MORE WELCOMING IN THEIR PUBLIC TREATMENT OF HABBASH, SEEKING TO WIN HIM OVER TO WHAT IS THE ESSENTIALLY PRO-FATAH VIEW OF THE GOA.

¶11. WHILE AVOIDING A PUBLIC BREAK WITH ANY PLO FACTION, THE ALGERIANS HAVE ALSO APPLIED DISCREET PRESSURE ON ALL GROUPS TO PUT REUNIFICATION ABOVE PERSONAL AND FACTIONAL INTERESTS. PART OF THIS PRESSURE IS TO INSTILL AND EXPLOIT A SENSE OF SHAME AND PERSONAL OBLIGATION. BENDJEDID HAS STAKED CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL CAPITAL ON HIS REUNIFICATION INITIATIVE, AND NO PALESTINIAN GROUP WANTS OPENLY TO DEFY THE PRESIDENT'S CALLS FOR UNITY AND BEAR THE BLAME FOR THE FAILURE OF HIS EFFORTS.

¶12. THE ALGERIANS HAVE ALSO TRIED TO PRESSURE SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS WHO THEY BELIEVE ARE OBSTRUCTING UNITY EFFORTS. IN FEBRUARY 1987, FOR EXAMPLE, THE ALGERIANS APPARENTLY GAVE ARAFAT COLD TREATMENT FOR OPPOSING A UNITY PLATFORM DURING AN ALGIERS PALESTINIAN WRITERS AND JOURNALISTS CONFERENCE. IN ORDER TO BRING GEORGE HABBASH AND THE PFLP INTO THE UNIFICATION TALKS, ALGERIA HAS TRIED TO USE WHAT INFLUENCE IT HAS ON THAT FACTION'S SYRIAN BACKERS. WITH THIS GOAL IN MIND, ALGERIA HAS TAKEN A NOTABLY PRO-SYRIAN PUBLIC STAND SINCE BENDJEDID'S JANUARY 23 VISIT TO DAMASCUS AND SINCE THE KUWAIT ISLAMIC CONFERENCE SUMMIT. IN SO DOING, ALGIERS HAS HAD TO SWALLOW HARD AND MAINTAIN PUBLIC SILENCE OVER SYRIA'S SUPPORT FOR THE AMAL MILITIA IN THE LEBANON CAMPS WAR.

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TERRORISM VS. NATIONAL LIBERATION  
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¶13. ALGERIA RECOGNIZES THE TERRIBLE DAMAGE THAT TERRORISM DOES TO THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE WITH WESTERN PUBLIC OPINION. YET, DRAWING FROM THEIR OWN STRUGGLE AGAINST THE FRENCH, THE ALGERIANS FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT USE OF VIOLENCE IS A LEGITIMATE TACTIC AGAINST A COLONIZER WHO SHOWS NO SIGN OF GIVING IN TO THE DEMANDS OF A "COLONIZED PEOPLE." ALGERIANS FEEL THE DILEMMA ACUTELY--BOTH ON A PHILOSOPHICAL AND A TACTICAL LEVEL--AND HAVE COME UP WITH A LINE OF ARGUMENT THAT CONDEMNS TERRORISM, BUT ACCEPTS THE MORAL AND TACTICAL VALIDITY OF ACTS OF VIOLENCE ON THE TERRITORY TO BE LIBERATED. THIS ALLOWS THE GOA TO BE CRITICAL OF TOTALLY REPRE-HENSIBLE ACTIONS LIKE RANDOM ATTACKS AT EUROPEAN AIRPORTS ON INNOCENT PASSENGERS AND THE ACHILLE LAURO AFFAIR, BUT PRESUMABLY LEAVES A DOOR OPEN TO ATTACKS ON ISRAEL DIRECTLY. FOR FEAR OF TYING THEMSELVES DOWN OR PREJUDGING ISSUES ON WHICH THE PALESTINIANS CANNOT THEMSELVES AGREE, THE ALGERIANS ARE PURPOSE-FULLY VAGUE ABOUT WHAT TERRITORY IS TO BE LIBERATED--THE WEST BANK AND GAZA OR ISRAEL ITSELF.

¶14. BEYOND THE PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUE, THE ALGERIANS FACE MORE PRACTICAL DILEMMAS IN HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATIONS THAT ENGAGE IN TERRORISM. THE ACHILLE LAURO DISASTER WAS EASY TO CRITICIZE,

BUT THEY STILL CONSIDER ABU ABBAS AN IMPORTANT PALESTINIAN LEADER WHO MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN UNITY GFFORTS. THEY CONSIDER ABU NIDAL BEYOND THE PALE, A JUDGMENT MADE EASIER BY THE FATAH DEATH SENTENCE AGAINST HIM, BUT THE GOA NONETHELESS IS NOT OVERTLY HOSTILE TO ABU NIDAL AND PERMITS AT LEAST TWO PALESTINIAN STUDENTS LOYAL TO HIM TO LIVE IN ALGIERS.

¶115. WHATEVER THE GOA'S VIEWS ON THE UTILITY OF TERRORISM, ALGERIA'S BROAD POLICY OF KEEPING DOORS OPEN TO EVERY CONCEIVABLE "NATIONAL LIBERATION" MOVEMENT OVERRIDES MOST OTHER CONSIDERATIONS. THE GOA SEES ITSELF AS THE WORLD'S MIDDLEMAN AND RECOGNIZES THAT TO DEAL WITH ALL PARTIES TO DISPUTES, IT MUST BE ON SPEAKING TERMS WITH THEM. AT A TIME WHEN NO OTHER COUNTRY COULD HAVE ACHIEVED WHAT ALGERIA HAS WITH THE PLO UNITY EFFORT THUS FAR, AN ARGUMENT CAN BE MADE IN FAVOR OF THAT OPENNESS.

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WILL THE REAL ALGERIA PLEASE STAND UP  
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¶116. ALGERIA HAS COME A LONG WAY FROM THE DAYS IT FORMED THE REJECTIONIST/STEADFASTNESS FRONT WITH THE LIKES OF SYRIA, SOUTH YEMEN, AND LIBYA. WHILE ITS VIEWS ON THE ARAB-ISRAEL DISPUTE HAVE CHANGED RADICALLY AND ITS WILLINGNESS TO HAVE ITS NAME ASSOCIATED WITH THE TRUE HARDLINERS IS NON-EXISTENT, THE GOA HAS BECOME VAGUE ON HOW IT THINKS PEACE CAN BE FOUND IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THE CAMP DAVID ACCORDS AND GESTURES LIKE HASSAN'S MEETING WITH PERES AT IFRANE ARE STILL ROUNDLY CRITICIZED IN THE ALGERIAN PRESS. YET, THE ALGERIANS WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY NOT TO CRITICIZE THE HUSSEIN/ARAFAT ACCORDS WHEN THEY SHOWED PROMISE OF WORKING, AND THEY HAVE MADE SOME OVERTURES TO EGYPT, INDICATING THAT THE EGYPTIANS CAN EVENTUALLY MAKE THEIR WAY BACK INTO THE ARAB COMMUNITY ON THEIR OWN TERMS.

¶117. SO FAR THE ALGERIANS HAVE CAREFULLY AVOIDED INVOLVEMENT IN DETAILS OF THE COMPLEX NEGOTIATIONS LEADING TO THE PNC MEETING. WHATEVER THEIR PRIVATE FEELINGS ABOUT SPECIFIC ISSUES, THEY HAVE TAKEN NO PUBLIC STAND ON THE ABROGATION OF THE AMMAN ACCORD, ON PLO TIES WITH EGYPT, ON THE ORGANIZATION OF PLO LEADERSHIP, OR ON OTHER DIVISIVE QUESTIONS. DRAWING ON THEIR OWN REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCE, THE ALGERIANS HAVE SAID ONLY THAT THE PALESTINIANS THEMSELVES MUST DECIDE THESE QUESTIONS WITHOUT OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE AND THAT PERSONALITIES, EVEN YASIR ARAFAT'S, SHOULD NOT BECOME AN ISSUE THAT OBSCURES REVOLUTIONARY GOALS.

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PROSPECTS  
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¶118. THE SHORT-TERM PROSPECTS FOR ALGERIA AND THE PLO RAISE A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS:

- A) CAN ALGERIA HOST A PNC MEETING IN APRIL AS PLANNED DESPITE FACTIONAL DISPUTES AMONG THE PALESTINIANS?
- B) IF SO, WILL THE PNC INCLUDE ALL FACTIONS OR WILL IT BE A RUMP SESSION WITHOUT PFLP AND OTHER PRO-SYRIAN PARTICIPATION? FOR THE ALGERIANS, THE LATTER WOULD REPRESENT ALMOST AS SERIOUS A DIPLOMATIC SETBACK AS A COMPLETE BREAKDOWN OF THE MEETING.
- C) WILL THE PNC MEETING ACHIEVE SOME SORT OF UNITY OR WILL IT BE ANOTHER FORUM FOR COMPETING GROUPS AND PERSONALITIES TO AIR THEIR DISPUTES IN PUBLIC?
- D) GIVEN THE COMPETING INFLUENCES AT WORK AMONG THE PALESTINIANS, WHAT WILL BE THE LIFE SPAN OF ANY AGREEMENT REACHED AT THE NEXT PNC?

¶19. WHILE ALGERIA RETAINS ITS SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVE OF BRINGING ALL PALESTINIAN FACTIONS TO ALGIERS IN LATE APRIL, ITS LONG-TERM GOAL REMAINS RESTORING A PLO THAT CAN PRESENT A FAÇADE OF UNITY, SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE ABOUT THE PRINCIPLES OF PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM, AND ATTEND AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AS A COHESIVE GROUP. AT THE SAME TIME, ALGERIA WILL TRY TO MAINTAIN ITS POSITION AS MEDIATOR AND DISINTERESTED FRIEND AND TEACHER TO ALL PALESTINIAN FACTIONS--A TEACHER WHOSE PRESTIGE AND EXPERIENCE SHOULD GUIDE RELUCTANT AND REBELLIOUS STUDENTS ON THE CORRECT REVOLUTIONARY PATH. IF ONLY THEY WOULD LISTEN.

JOHNSTONE